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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000019

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SUBJECT: ECOWAS CONTINUES PUSH FOR ELECTIONS, ALL-INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT IN GUINEA

REF: A. CONAKRY 833

1B. CONAKRY 839

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION KENT C. BROKENSHIRE

11. (U) Summary: A visiting ECOWAS delegation urged the government of Guinea to expand participation of civilians and shorten the transition period to 9-12 months. Speaking to diplomats from the EU, US and the West Africa region, ECOWAS SecGen Chambas said he was impressed with Guinea's new prime minister, noting that he favors widely observed elections, and has "good ideas on the state of the economy." ECOWAS reported that President Camara also spoke in favor of timely elections, and promised that members of the ruling CNDD would willingly step down once a civilian government was elected. Pointed questions from resident diplomats, however, revealed that the ECOWAS delegation had only surface knowledge of Guinean politics, and had perhaps underestimated the challenges of neutralizing the military's role in Guinean politics. ECOWAS foreign ministers will meet in Abuja February 9, in order to make a recommendation on Guinea to ECOWAS heads of state who will meet on February 10. End Summary

GUINEANS VOICE COMMON CONCERNS

12. (U) A second high-level ECOWAS delegation visited Guinea January 2-5, and met with civil society and the independent electoral commission. ECOWAS then raised concerns expressed by these groups with Guinea's newly-appointed Prime Minister Kabine Komara, the President, and members of the CNDD. On January 5 the ECOWAS delegation led by former Nigerian President Ibrahim Babangida and ECOWAS Secretary General Dr. Mohamed Chambas called for a meeting of G-8 and ECOWAS diplomats at the Nigerian Embassy in Conakry. The UN, EU, and World Bank also sent representatives.

13. (U) Chambas said ECOWAS discussed the following topics with the new Prime Minister:

- The need for wider consultation between the new government and civilian stakeholders

- The establishment of a legal framework for elections and greater civilian participation in the transition process. ECOWAS particularly stressed the participation of women and youth.

- The need for the government to appoint qualified individuals to senior positions.

- The need for increased discipline in the armed forces.

- The need for judicial reform and an end to impunity. The re-establishment of the commission of inquiry on violence

during the 2006-2007 demonstrations.

- A transition period of 9-12 months, with the promise that no member of the CNDD or Prime Minister's entourage would run for office.

ECOWAS 'IMPRESSED' WITH NEW PRIME MINISTER

¶3. (U) Chambas said Guinea's new prime minister made a favorable impression on the delegation. "He clearly understands the task ahead and what is required of him. A good choice was made in selecting him," said Chambas. He added that the Prime Minister made clear that he does not wish to participate in elections himself, and will urge members of the government to quit their positions if they wish to run for public office. The Prime Minister also told ECOWAS that he agreed that a quick transition would serve Guinea best, and promised to run a "transparent and open" government. Chambas said the Prime Minister was considering creating a Ministry of Elections, and hoped the elections would be 'widely observed' by the international community.

THE PRESIDENT'S PROMISES

¶4. (U) Chambas said President Camara was also open to timely elections and a quick transition. He promised ECOWAS that, in order to pave the way for a smoother transition to civilian rule, military members of the CNDD would quit the armed

CONAKRY 00000019 002 OF 002

forces and, if necessary, depart the country following elections. He also stated that military members of the CNDD would refrain from promoting themselves to higher ranks during the transition period.

DISCOMFORTING QUESTIONS

¶5. (U) Chambas' generally positive tone did not deter the diplomatic corps from asking some pointed questions. Diplomats noted that three key ministries had been given to military men apparently without consulting the Prime Minister. These included the Ministries of Defense, Security, and the Presidency. The Ambassador from Mali noted that the Independent Electoral Commission had been attached to the presidency, raising questions as to its independence. The US Charge expressed concern that a military officer had reportedly been proclaimed head of the National Communication Commission (Ref B), which serves as the country's media regulatory body with powers to censor the press. The ECOWAS delegation urged the diplomatic corps to wait until a viable government had been established before raising such concerns.

NEXT ROUND IN ABUJA

¶6. (U) Chambas stated that ECOWAS would convene a foreign minister's summit in Abuja on February 9 to review Guinea's suspension from the African Union. He invited Guinean civil society to take part in the summit. The Foreign Ministers would make a recommendation on Guinea at the ECOWAS heads of state summit, which will be held in Abuja February 10.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Chambas was decidedly upbeat over prospects of returning Guinea to elections and civilian rule. However, his favorable impression of the Prime Minister, a view widely

shared by others, appears largely based on Komara's asserted determination to hold free and fair elections in a timely manner. Much of his palpable optimism on Guinea seems to spring from Komara's own resolve to move the democratic process forward. Komara, however, will not be the determining factor on the openness of the next elections, or even if they will take place. The military will.

¶8. (C) Barring further upheavals in the military hierarchy, President Dadis Camara will be the key player. This is the same Dadis Camara who two weeks ago was in charge of the government fuel depot, a position that has been compared to a gas station attendant. This week Camara reportedly received an armored Nissan from Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi. Will he be willing to surrender such trappings of power after a year in the presidential palace? And what about cronies such as Claude Pivi, a documented torturer with ties to narco-traffickers? Over the past few months Pivi has skyrocketed from an obscure enlisted man in the Guinean army to Minister of Presidential Security. These are the winners of the coup, the soldiers who literally overnight attained the apogee of power and possibility, and who will need to surrender it all back if Guinea is to advance. These are the actors Chambas and ECOWAS should be watching.

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